

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

**NRIS Reference Number: 91000565      Date Listed: 5/16/91**

FROLIC (brig)                      Mendocino CA  
Property Name                      County      State

N/A  
Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*for* *Antoinette Lee*  
Signature of the Keeper

5/21/91  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

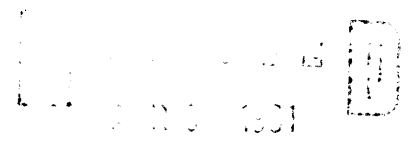
**Statement of Significance:** Because so little of the property remains intact, under Applicable National Register Criteria, C is removed and under Areas of Significance, Architecture is removed.

**DISTRIBUTION:**  
National Register property file  
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

565

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Frolic  
other names/site number Shipwreck Site and Remains, Frolic

2. Location

street & number \_\_\_\_\_  not for publication  
city, town Caspar  vicinity  
state California code 06 county Mendocino code 045 zip code \_\_\_\_\_

3. Classification

|  |  |                                     |                  |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Ownership of Property                            | Category of Property                     | Number of Resources within Property |                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> private                 | <input type="checkbox"/> building(s)     | Contributing                        | Noncontributing  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-local            | <input type="checkbox"/> district        | <u>1</u>                            | _____ buildings  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site | _____                               | _____ sites      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal          | <input type="checkbox"/> structure       | _____                               | _____ structures |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> object          | <u>1</u>                            | _____ objects    |
|  |  |                                     | _____ Total      |

Name of related multiple property listing: NA Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Kathryn Qualen 3/26/91  
Signature of certifying official Date  
California State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. Autumnella Lee 5/16/91  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

JA Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION: water-related

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

VACANT: NOT IN USE

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

NA

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation NA

walls

roof

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The remains of the brig Frolic, wrecked in 1850 while en route to San Francisco, lie approximately 120 miles north of San Francisco on the California coast inside a small, unnamed cove between Point Cabrillo and Caspar Anchorage. The Frolic wreck site is recorded as California Archaeological Site CA-MEN-1947H.

Frolic as Built

The opium clipper Frolic was built in Baltimore by the shipbuilding firm of W. & G. Gardner and her launching was noted in the Baltimore Sun on December 7, 1844. A contemporary broadside boasted "she is a full-rigged brig of about 230 tons berthen, built for an extensive house in Boston; intended to trade upon the coast of China, and is to be commanded by Capt. Faucon of Boston."

The April 29, 1845 issue of the Bombay Times reported Frolic's arrival in India on March 6, 1845 and her departure on April 29, 1845 with a hold full of opium bound for China.

Fast, well-built, and well-armed craft were requisite in the dangerous Opium Trade for which Frolic was intended. Opium clippers like Frolic were often forced to outrun or outfight Chinese, Malay, or Dyak pirates bent on capturing valuable cargoes of precious metals, woods, silks, ivory, spices and drugs. (20) Frolic's defenses included cannon, small arms, and edged weapons.

Home ported in Boston, Frolic was a relative rarity in the Opium Trade. Of approximately 100 vessels reported to have engaged in the nefarious drug trade with China between 1823 and 1860, Frolic was one of only 16 or 17 such vessels built in the United States. Frolic is the last American-built opium clipper.

Archeological Remains of Frolic

The wreck of Frolic lies in approximately 15 to 25 feet of water within 150 feet of the shore close into a group of rocks in a small, unnamed cove between Point Cabrillo and Caspar Anchorage.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Maritime History  
Archeology: ~~Historic/non-aboriginal~~  
Archeology: Historic/aboriginal  
Architecture  
Commerce  
Transportation

Period of Significance

1844-1850

Significant Dates

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

Gardner, W. and G. (Builders)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The remains of the opium clipper Frolic, wrecked on the California coast on July 26, 1850, while en route to San Francisco with a speculative cargo, are of NATIONAL significance through A) her association with the California Gold Rush, an event with a tremendous impact on the social and economic history of the United States and the development of the Pacific Coast. Frolic particularly represents vessels engaged in Trans-Pacific trade which sailed to and from California during the Gold Rush and is the only known vessel available for study with China Trade goods. Frolic is also of NATIONAL significance because of her association with the American China Trade, specifically the Opium Trade aspect of that commercial activity, and because she alone is known to be available for study in American waters to document the characteristics of the rare American-built "opium clippers." Frolic's wreck was the key event leading to the settlement of the Mendocino County coast during the Gold Rush period, potential salvage of her cargo attracting a reconnaissance which while not finding a salvageable cargo from Frolic did see a substantial timber resource, leading to the establishment of saw mills and lumber ports. Frolic is also significant because C) she is the only known representative of some 17 or 18 American-built opium clippers, a rare, largely undocumented class of vessel and Frolic's remains are the only known means of documenting this type of craft. Frolic's wreck, partially salvaged by the local Mitom Pomo, served as a temporal "touchstone" for their culture, preserved in their oral history. The archeological remains of the vessel's cargo are significant since D) they can be used to assess China trade goods sent to Gold Rush California, particularly a speculative cargo, for comparison with manifests and published newspaper accounts of other China trade good cargoes. Frolic's cargo is the only known assemblage of Gold Rush China trade goods available for study. Additional archeological research at nearby Mitom Pomo sites and at the Frolic wreck site could also better document the salvage and assimilation of Frolic's cargo by the indigenous native population. Finally, archeological excavation of Frolic, in

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Please see attached.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 3.1

UTM References

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

All of that area encompassed within a circle radiating from the center point of the wreck, as defined by the ballast pile, for 200 yards.

See continuation sheet

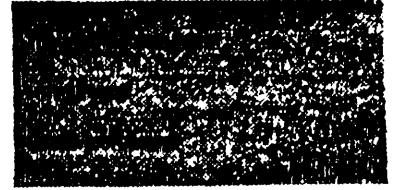
Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass all known wreckage and scatter located in the cove.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Thomas N. Layton and James P. Delgado date August, 1990  
 organization National Park Service telephone (202) 343-9528  
 street & number Box 37127 state D.C. zip code 20013-7127  
 city or town Washington.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2

The wreck site is principally marked by a mound of kentledge (pig iron) ballast. Individual kentledge ballast blocks occur in two sizes; 14 inches long, 6 inches wide, 4 inches thick; and 26 inches long, 7 inches wide, and 5 inches thick. Each type has a tapered 1/2-inch diameter hole at one end. Three admiralty style iron anchors lie at the northeast end of the ballast pile at the base of a large rock. A small cast iron cannon lies near the kentledge; it is badly worn by surf abrasion and the cascabel is missing. A large number of ceramic fragments lie scattered among the kentledge and in the rocks in a spreading pattern moving south from the main concentration of wreckage.

The wreck of Frolic was discovered by local sport divers in the early 1960s. Since then, sport divers have made periodic forays and recovered loose items from the site. Additional cannon were removed; one is on display at the Kelley House Museum in nearby Mendocino. A number of the artifacts collected from the site have been gathered by Dr. Thomas Layton, Department of Anthropology, San Jose State University, for comparison with Frolic artifacts salvaged from the wreck by the local Mitom Pomo and recovered by Layton during his excavation of Three Chop Village, a Mitom Pomo site (CA-MEN-790), in 1984. Layton recovered 50 shards of Chinese porcelaneous stoneware. "The Pomo treated the ceramics as a raw material from which to manufacture ornaments and tools, and 45 fragments represent detritus from this activity." (5) Additionally, 148 fragments of dark green bottle glass were recovered; of these ten fragments had been flaked to form three possible projectile point preform fragments, 2 utilized flakes, and 5 modified flakes. (6) Other historic period artifacts excavated at Three Chop Village include 4 clear glass fragments, and a sheet brass fragment and brass tack, probably decorative furniture garnishes. All of these items are believed to have been salvaged by the local Mitom Pomo.

Material culture from the wreck gathered from sport divers by Dr. Layton includes an bamboo fan, a silver tinder and flint box, porcelaneous stoneware, earthenware, brass furniture hardware (including garnishes and tacks), mother-of-pearl inlay, glass beads, and brass handles, hinges, and lock plates from wooden chests. Maritime architectural artifacts recovered include brass ship's spikes, a brass porthole, copper sheathing, sheathing

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 3

nails, and a brass drift bolt. The number of artifacts recovered by sport divers from the site is relatively small; no major subsurface disturbance has occurred and it is presumed that the integrity of the site and its potential to yield meaningful data has not been seriously impaired.

1

Basil Lubbock, The Opium Clippers (Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1933) p. 384.

2

William Armstrong Fairburn, Merchant Sail, Six Volumes. (Center Lovell, Maine: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, Inc., 1955) Volume IV, p. 2584.

3

Howard I. Chapelle, The Search for Speed Under Sail, 1700-1855 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967) p. 317.

4

Ibid.

5

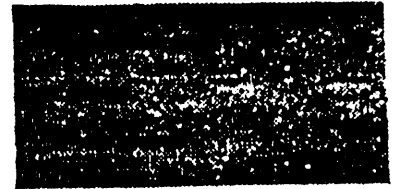
Thomas N. Layton, "Three Chop Village: A Mitom Pomo Camp on the Trail to the Coast," (1986) Draft manuscript, Department of Anthropology, San Jose State University, California. p. 25.

6

Ibid. p. 26.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

addition to documenting particulars of the vessel's construction and characteristics, might also offer insight into the nature of shipboard life and routine, including provisioning and defense of the vessel.

This statement of significance is based on the discussion which follows.

### Frolic's Role in Pre-Gold Rush Maritime Commerce

Independent American trade with China began with the departure of the ship Empress of China from New York on February 22, 1784. The successful return of Empress of China on May 11, 1785, laden with tea, nankeens, silk, porcelain, and cinnamon bark inaugurated a major international maritime trade for the new American nation. (1) Through the late 18th Century and into the early 19th Century, as the China Trade prospered, several American commission firms were established in Canton, China. Among these firms was Russell and Company of Boston and Canton. Established in 1818 by Samuel Russell, the firm, closely linked with influential Chinese government officials, began to expand in the 1830s. (2) By 1845 Russell and Company probably was the most powerful American firm trading in China.

Silver and furs were among the perennially popular items traded to the Chinese in return for tea, silks, spices, porcelain, wickerware, rough cottons, lacquer ware, camphor wood chests, teak, and earthenwares. By the 1820s, however, a new commodity, opium, was gaining ascendancy among the items traded to the Chinese. Opium was illicitly carried from Bombay, India to Canton, where it generally commanded high prices. A major new trade, the Opium Trade, sprang up, and many firms, including Russell and Company, participated in it. Russell and Company had a number of vessel employed in the Opium Trade as part of their larger China Trade operations. One of the vessels was the clipper brig Frolic. While Frolic may have been engaged in the trade as early as 1843-1844, the earliest recorded date of her sailing from Bombay was May of 1845. (3) For the next five years Frolic was an active participant in the Opium Trade, sailing between Bombay, Canton, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Macao. Frolic was a fast sailer; on her second 1845 run from Hong Kong to

SEE CONTINUATION SHEAT



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page 3

Bombay, she covered the distance in only 35 days, the fastest run of the entire opium fleet during that year. (4) Frolic continued in the Opium Trade until 1850, when she was sent to California in response to the increased prospects for trade during the Gold Rush. Another factor influencing Frolic's departure from the Opium Trade may have been the inroads of steamers; by 1860 the last opium clipper was replaced by steam.

Frolic's Role in the Gold Rush

The massive influx of humanity into California during the Gold Rush brought a high demand for manufactured goods. Seizing the opportunity for a high profit venture, Russell and Company decided to dispatch a cargo to San Francisco. On May 25, 1850, Frolic arrived at Canton from Bombay, probably unloaded a cargo of opium and took on a cargo of manufactured goods. On May 30 she left Canton for Hong Kong, a distance of 78 miles by water. There she took on additional cargo, identified as sundries from Bush and Company and, as was reported by the China Mail, set sail for San Francisco on June 7. (5) Frolic made an extremely fast 50-day passage across the Pacific but ran aground just 0.8 km north of Point Cabrillo on the night of July 26.

The only direct account of the wreck was published in the Daily Alta California on August 5, 1850. The article reported that Frolic struck a reef and filled immediately. Six of the crew were drowned. The captain, officers, and three men reached safety at Fort Ross in a lifeboat while the remainder of the crew preferred to walk. The article concluded, "The Frolic was bound for this port with a valuable cargo of Chinese goods. The loss is estimated to be about \$150,000." As the survivors traveled south from Fort Ross to Bodega and on to San Francisco, news of the rich wreck spread and within a month became public knowledge with appearance of the Daily Alta California article on August 5. In fact, word of the wreck quickly reached Hong Kong where on October 3, 1850, the China Mail quoted verbatim from the Daily Alta article.

The wreck of Frolic, lying in 20 feet of water and less than 150 feet from the shore, was easy prey to looters, and as the ship broke up during 1850 and 1851, an unknown number of Indians and

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 4

Americans, salvaged materials from her cargo. By August 1851 numerous goods from Frolic had reached as far inland as what is today Ukiah in the Russian River Valley where they were noted by George Gibbs who was serving as an interpreter in Redick McKee's expedition to make treaties with the Indians of the North Coast Ranges. Gibbs kept a journal of the trip and, on August 23, 1851, he wrote:

A couple of miles beyond, we reached the last house on the river, that of George Parker Armstrong, or as he is erroneously called, "John Parker", to whom reference has already been made. The house was a small building of logs, or rather, poles filled in with clay, and thatched with tule. Its furniture was somewhat incongruous; for upon the earthen floor and beside a bull's hide partition, stood huge china jars, camphor trunks, and lacquered ware in abundance, the relics of some vessel [Frolic] that had been wrecked on the coast during last spring. (6)

The only documented attempt to salvage the cargo of Frolic during this period was that of Jerome B. Ford in 1851. Ford's diary of the trip is now lost, the only account being a reminiscence of his son, Jerome Chester Ford, in 1933. (7) Jerome B. Ford was visiting at Stephen Smith and Henry Meiggs' lumber mill at Bodega when he heard of the wreck of Frolic. He traveled up the coast early in 1851, planning to salvage her cargo and was directed to the wreck site by William Kasten where he found Indian women wearing silk shawls derived from the cargo, but was himself too late to find anything to salvage. The trip, however, was not a complete loss, because Ford noted the giant redwoods on Big River, and on his return to San Francisco reported their commercial potential to his employer, Henry Meiggs. Meiggs' response was to order an entire lumber mill set-up shipped around the Horn. The mill was assembled at Big River in 1852, and thus began both the lumber industry and the first town on the Mendocino Coast, initially known as Meiggsville, later as Big River, and today as Mendocino City. (8) The early settlers at Big River were well aware of the shipwreck, if not of its name. For example, the Kelley family women wore clothing made from

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page 5

three bolts of silk traded to Mrs. Kelley by Indians who had taken it from the wreck.

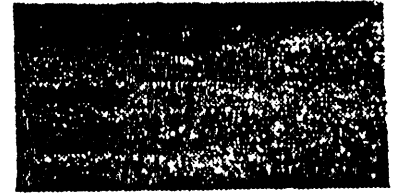
#### Archeological Potential of the Site

There is no known manifest listing the cargo of Frolic. Thus, reconstruction of her cargo, which is now being done by Dr. Thomas Layton, Department of Anthropology, San Jose State University (California), can only be based on data from three sources: materials recovered from the wreck site; materials excavated at Three Chop Village, a nearby Mitom Pomo village whose inhabitants salvaged materials from the wreck; and items mentioned in early historic accounts. Two observations are appropriate here. The first is that perishable items generally do not preserve in the archeological record. In this regard, it is interesting to note that nineteenth century references to Frolic mainly mention the perishable parts of her cargo. In 1851, Jerome B. Ford found Indians "with a few silk things" and squaws "wearing silk shawls," while in the same year Gibbs described John Parker's cabin as containing "huge china jars, camphor trunks, and lacquered ware in abundance," and thirty years later, the History of Mendocino County wrote of "a vessel laden with silk and tea." (9)

The second observation is that perishable items, such as fabrics, camphor trunks, and lacquered ware, and particularly fragile items, such as large china jars, would have been packed high in the cargo hold to prevent water damage or breakage, while sturdy imperishable items would have been packed much lower and would have been far more difficult to salvage from Frolic's sunken hulk. Ceramic plates, saucers, and bowls would have been packed in heavy stacks, in nested fashion, deep in the hold; whereas large, fragile china jars whose shapes prevented nesting, would have been packed individually elsewhere. Thus, due to both the vagaries of preservation and the placement of objects in the cargo hold, mid-Nineteenth Century salvagers recovered rather different objects from Frolic than have 20th Century wreck divers.

The early day salvagers, Indians included, apparently never reached the bottom of Frolic's hold which contained first a

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page 6

ballast of kentledge (pig iron bars) and, immediately above that, stacks of bowls, saucers, and plates of Chinese porcelaneous stoneware. They did, however, reach the upper levels of the cargo. At Three Chop Village, archeologists have recovered 50 small sherds of Chinese porcelaneous stoneware and 148 fragments of green bottle glass. The few small sherds from which vessel forms could be reconstructed were from one or more large blue-on-white Chinese jars. Only one such jar was recovered by wreck divers from Frolic, the others having been scavenged a century earlier by the Mitom Pomo, "John Parker," and persons unknown. The green bottle glass excavated at Three Chop Village was identical to still corked bottle fragments recovered by wreck divers from Frolic. The Mitom Pomo at Three Chop Village attempted to use sherds broken from the blue-on-white jars much as they would have used raw clam shell to make disk beads, and they used the green bottle glass much as they would have used at Three Chop Village to gain a better idea of the range of vessel forms and other imperishable objects that were originally present in the upper portions of the hold of Frolic. Additionally, excavation of Frolic would reveal important information about surviving material culture in the wreck perhaps not represented at Three Chop Village and aid in the reconstruction of the earliest known archeologically surviving China trade cargo sent to Gold Rush California.

Maritime archeological research on Frolic herself would provide the first archeological documentation of an American Opium clipper of the early 19th Century, providing insights into a specialized type of armed, speedy craft built for a dangerous lucrative trade, including techniques of hull construction, hull form, and armament. This type of documentation is important because of the the relatively limited number of American-built opium clippers. Frolic herself is a largely undocumented vessel in the historical record; registry documents could not be located and so the particulars of this individual vessel remain speculative. The archeological record may also include personal items pertaining to shipboard life and routine.

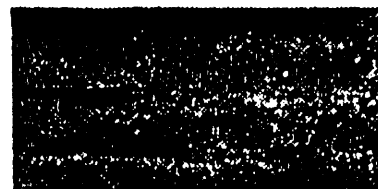
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David Sanctuary Howard, New York and the China Trade (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1984) p. 17.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

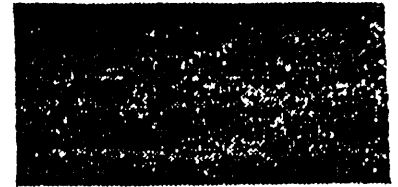
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Page 7

- 2  
Basil Lubbock, The Opium Clippers (Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1933) p.89.
- 3  
Ibid., p. 287.
- 4  
William Armstrong Fairburn, Merchant Sail. Six Volumes. (Center Lovell, Maine: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, Inc., 1955) Vol. IV, p. 2584.
- 5  
China Mail (Hong Kong) May 30, June 7, June 13, 1850.
- 6  
George Gibbs, "Journal of the Expedition of Colonel Redick McKee, United States Indian Agent, Through Northwestern California," in Henry R. Schoolcraft, ed. Historical and Statistical Information, Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States (Philadelphia, 1853) Vol. III, p. 113.
- 7  
Dorothy Bear and Beth Stebbins, Mendocino--Book Two (Mendocino, California: Gull Press, 1977) p. 9
- 8  
Dorothy Bear and Beth Stebbins, Mendocino County--Book One of a Projected Series (Mendocino, California: Mendocino Historic Research, Inc., 1973) p. 11.
- 9  
Lyman L. Palmer, History of Mendocino County, California, Illustrated (San Francisco: Alley, Bowen & Company, 1880), p. 398.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 1

SOURCES

Manuscript Sources

Layton, Thomas N., "Three Chop Village: A Mitom Pomo Camp on the Trail to the Coast," (1986) Draft manuscript, Department of Anthropology, San Jose State University, California.

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Bear, Dorothy, and Beth Stebbins, Mendocino County: Book One of a Series. Mendocino, California: Mendocino Historic Research, Inc., 1973.

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Chappelle, Howard I., The Search for Speed Under Sail, 1700-1855. New York: W.W. Norton, 1967.

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Hong Kong China Mail, May 30, June 7, June 13, October 3, 1850.

San Francisco Daily Alta California, August 5, 1850.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

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1262 IV NE  
(FORT BRAGG)

431

47'30" 432

